

**Middletown Library Board
Meeting of December 18, 2013
MINUTES**

The meeting began at 7:05 pm.

Board members in attendance were Siebert, Nelsen, Siwec, Cordiano, Fiore, Breen, and Wilson. Absent were board members Monaghan and Vitkansas. Also in attendance were administrative secretary Wendy Latona and attorney Armen McOmber. Three members of the public were also in attendance.

Immediately after opening the meeting, the board entered into an executive session (the first of two) that lasted about 50 minutes. The purpose was to discuss the hiring of a new director. The candidate was present. Prior to entering the executive session, the board president announced that action would be taken upon re-entering public session. No action was taken with regard to this issue, however.

The public session re-opened at about 8:00 pm.

During the public comments portion, resident Melanie Elmiger began by stating that at the last meeting, Mr. Nelsen was the only 'no' vote on the October financials. Fiore cut in that this public portion was intended for items on the agenda. Elmiger responded that the financial report is an agenda item, but was told by Fiore to bring it up at the end of the meeting. She then asked why the 2014 budget was missing from the agenda since the board president said at the last meeting that it would be discussed this month. The board responded that it would be discussed under new business.

Approval of the November meeting minutes was tabled until January.

The board discussed the topic of the library's sponsorship of a Middletown 350 banner. Ms. Breen asked why that was necessary if the library is part of the township and felt that the sponsorships were intended for businesses. The 80 banners are already up around town along Kings Hwy and Church Street. Fiore said that no other township organizations – namely the fire departments and first aid squads – were being “given” a banner for free, and that any business or organization that wanted one would need to sponsor one. The board voted to sponsor a 350 banner. Cordiano, Siwec, Siebert and Wilson voted yes. Nelsen voted no. Breen abstained, and Fiore recused.

The financials for the period ending Nov. 30 were discussed. It was noted that the library is still being billed by JCP&L for the former Lincroft branch. Fiore said that the bills for the period beginning the day after the branch closure should revert to the township. The board voted to approve the financials. Nelsen abstained; Wilson voted no; and Fiore, Cordiano, Siebert, Siwec, and Breen voted yes.

Nelsen gave the Finance Committee report. Salary and wages is down \$275K from last year due to branch closures and attrition. Fewer reserve monies were used for the 2014 budget than the prior year.

Fiore asked about comments received regarding the branch closures since their closure. There have been few received by the library since then. Siebert said that people voiced their opinions prior to the closures.

Breen asked about groundskeeping. The budgeted amount continues to include services for shrub care and fertilizing, which services are not handled by the township.

The 2014 budget was discussed.

Cordiano noted that the budget for DVDs and CDs had been lowered with the 2014 budget and suggested charging \$1 for these items over some monthly allowance of 1 or 2 free DVDs per patron. *(This conversation is about 25 minutes into the video.)* He asked about statistics for the patrons taking out these

items and suggested that a handful of patrons may be over-using these materials. He and Fiore requested the number of unique users, and Ms. Latona said she would obtain the info if available. Cordiano suggested the focus should be on books. Breen pointed out that housing other materials is part of the changing role of libraries. Siebert stated that entertainment comes in different forms.

Fiore noted the 2013 budget for DVDs/CDs is \$37K and that the November financials show \$20K spent. (This does not count outstanding invoices, where the system updates may reflect a significant lag, as brought to the board's attention earlier this year.) He asked if the budget was too high, or if purchases are done at the end of the year. For books, he said \$300K is budgeted for 2013, and \$180K is shown as spent on the November financial report. (Readers should note that the library's municipal appropriation, which is most of its funding, is in township accounts. The end of year activity may relate in part to movement of funds into reserve accounts.)

The board tabled discussion regarding replacement of the manager in the children's department. The current manager retires this month.

A page in the borrower services department recently resigned. Replacement was discussed. Fiore asked about the need for a new page given a decline in items borrowed. Siebert recommended hiring a page due to frequent page turnover and additional turnover expected in 2014. Fiore asked about page counts and Ms. Latona left the meeting room to retrieve them. Upon returning, she stated there were 10 pages last year, and there are 7 following the recent resignation. The board voted 7-0 to hire a new page. The cost is about \$6000 annually.

Fiore requested two changes in the meeting rules. One, he requested that one of the two public comment sessions be eliminated. He opined that the first one at the start of the meeting is duplicative. Two, he noted there was no board member comment portion and requested one be added to the agenda. Siwiec stated that elimination of the first public comment period would not allow people to comment on agenda items before votes are taken. Breen felt that the meetings should be as open to the public as possible. These requested changes will be taken up by the appropriate sub-committees for consideration at a future meeting of the board.

Resolution 2013-38, Continued Legal Services, was adopted 7-0. This continues legal services at the current rate until appointment is addressed at the January reorganization meeting.

Resolution 2013-39, Purchase of New Copiers, was tabled. Additional information about bids and prices, such as ink cartridge prices, was requested. Ms. Latona said that Ms. Kopp had this info. The board felt it would be helpful if Ms. Kopp attended the board meetings, and it was agreed she should be asked to attend future meetings. Ms. Latona noted that the current copiers are at the end of their useful lives.

Resolution 2013-40, Consolidation of Bank Accounts, was discussed. Considerations included interest rates as well as ease of operations. (time stamp 1:15:00 approximately). The resolution was adopted.

Siebert thanked Ms. Wilson, whose term ends this month, for her service.

Public Comments (time stamp 1:20:00 approximately):

Linda Baum asked Mr. Nelsen the specific reason for his abstentions on the financials this month and last. He replied that he had unanswered questions. Baum asked who is responsible for responding and when a response was expected. Nelsen turned to Siebert. Siebert said he had not yet spoken to the new township CFO. Baum asked if he felt there would be resolution by the next board meeting. He said possibly. Subsequent to the meeting, Baum suggested that the board contact Debbie Ball, a long-time employee in the township finance department who is capable of answering questions about the financial reports.

Baum spoke against the elimination of a public comment period, noting that public attendees sit through hours of board deliberation and have little opportunity to participate as it is. She said the comment period at the beginning of the meeting serves a different purpose than the one at the end and said it is important that public bodies remember who they serve.

Baum asked about the status of the manager in the children's department. The board said the current manager's last day was Dec. 21 but that her official retirement date is Jan. 1. Board discussion about her replacement is being tabled until a new director is in place.

Melanie Elmiger asked if there had been any work done on the strategic plan by the Strategic Plan Committee, and whether work was done before or after the branches closed. Siebert replied that some work had been done by the former director after the branches closed.

Elmiger asked for the 2014 municipal appropriation amount and was told it is \$3,387,631. She asked if the draft 2014 budget would be posted on the library's website like it was last year. Siebert said that he hadn't decided that yet. She asked what the protocol was for the decision, whether it was up to the board or at the discretion of the director. No clear answer was given.

Elmiger asked what was included in the 12% circulation decline quoted earlier in the meeting and was told it included all materials.

Elmiger thanked Mr. Siwec for his statement about the benefit of the initial public comment period. She noted that the vagueness of the agenda and sparse information about discussion items often make public inquiry necessary at the start of the meeting. She also said that it is important for the board to hear public opinion before a vote because it could sway the way a member votes on an issue.

Elmiger also said that she was upset by the tone taken by Mr. Fiore and by his word choices and sarcasm. Fiore was defensive. Ms. Breen said that every courtesy should be extended to the public and that they should always be treated respectfully.

Following the public session, the board entered another executive session at 9:33 pm to discuss the two salary resolutions, 2013-41 and 2013-42. The public session resumed at 10:14, at which time the board voted on the two resolutions.

Resolution 2013-41 (adopted) – This resolution provided for a retroactive stipend of \$2000 for the period Sept. 18 through Dec. 31 for Joan Kopp for additional financial responsibilities, and also a \$400 per month increase to be voted on monthly. Cordiano, Fiore, Siwec and Siebert voted yes, Nelsen voted no, and Breen and Wilson abstained.

Resolution 2013-42 (adopted)– This resolution provided for a retroactive stipend of \$6000 for the period Sept. 18 through Dec. 31 for Wendy Latona for additional administrative responsibilities, and also a \$1000 per month increase to be voted on monthly. Cordiano, Fiore, Siwec and Siebert voted yes, Nelsen and Wilson voted no, and Breen abstained.

The meeting concluded at 10:22 pm.